What Do We Believe?

An Address Delivered at Friends' Boarding School, Barnesville, Ohio, by Jesse Edgerton.

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It is well, I think, that we Friends, younger as well as older should, not only know what we believe, but be able, when asked, to define our belief as members of a religious body, differing in some important particulars from other Christian denominations; or as Peter puts it, "being ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear. I Peter III. 15.

In my talk to you this evening, I do not propose a complete or exhaustive expo-

sition of our religious faith, but only briefly and simply, as I may be enabled to do, outline a few of the distinguishing points of Quaker doctrine, the doctrine of your parents, the doctrine of the early Friends, the doctrine, as I believe, of the Primitive Church.

Quakerism, in the rise of the Society, was held to be "Primitive Christianity revived;" and although other religious bodies claim, for their respective tenets, the sanction of scripture authority, yet I think it can be shown that ours is not a whit behind any of them in the validity of our assertion that Quakerism coincides with the teaching of our Lord and his disciples.

The name chosen for the Society altho, it may not be considered euphonious, means, nevertheless, so much; so much of love to our Divine Lord, so much of obedience to Him, so much of communion between the Church and its great Head!

"Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of

my Father, I have made known unto you."

How beautifully are the fundamentals of Quakerism revealed in this passage of scripture, (John XV-14-15) wherefrom the Society gets its name!

We believe, in common with other evangelical denominations, in one only wise omnipotent, omniscient and eternal God, and His only begotten Son; our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In His immaculate conception and birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and miraculous resurrection. We believe in His Divinity and spiritual offices and in the acceptable sacrifice of himself on Calvary for the sins of all mankind; whereby through the saving influence of His Spirit within us, we are led to repent of, and forsake our sins, and thus realize the virtue of the atonement, and reconciliation with God. "We believe." says Robert Barclay "that the remission of sins which any partake of, is only in, and by virtue of that most satisfactory sacrifice, and no otherwise."

We believe in the three who bear record in Heaven, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and that these three are one; yet

we avoid the term "Trinity," as applied to these Divine characters, as not found in the Bible, as less appropriate, and more confusing than the simple terms used in scripture.

With these evangelical bodies, we believe in the realities of a future and spiritual life, after the termination of our present state of being. With them also we accept and hold the authenticity of the Bible, but unlike them we do not call it the "Word of God."

This is not through any lack of appreciation of its precious truths, for we believe that "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Rom. XV. 4.) "The prophecy came not in old time, by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1. 21). We believe also that the "New Testament writers, moved by the same power and spirit, gave us that portion of the sacred record, and that "they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. III-16.) The "Word of God," as abundantly shown in the Bible, is a term applied to Christ, and not to the Book of books.

For instance in St. John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Paul also says (Heb. XI-1.) "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God."

These and numerous other passages which we might quote, prove conclusively, as we think, the correctness of the position that Friends have ever held, that the Bible is not that, which the Bible itself calls the "Word of God."

This point wherein Friends differ from other Christian professors, very naturally suggests others, some of which I shall mention. Were I asked what doctrine, above all others, distinguishes Friends from oth-

er religious bodies, I would answer, "Immediate revelation," or the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit revealed within us. Barclay has called it the "Inner Light." Whittier speaks of it as the "Divine Immanence," and better still Paul names it "The Grace of God, that bringeth salvation, which hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world," etc. (Titus II, 11 and 12).

Other religious bodies hold the Bible to be the "primary rule of faith and practice." Friends hold this "True Light" which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1—9) as the primary rule, antecedent, and superior to the Scriptures, being their origin and inspiration and hence will not lead us away from the truths contained in the Bible.

We believe that this Light, Spirit or Grace of God in the heart, can and will as we heed and obey it, make us "wise unto salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

One of the best known testimonies of

the Society, one which has perhaps given it a more prominent place in history than any other, is our opposition to war, and to the spirit which engenders it. A few other religious organizations stand with Friends, upon Christs' interdiction of all war, in His Sermon on the Mount; the Mennonites and Doukhobors being the principal ones. Most other denominations allow their membership to engage in military service without hindrance, and strange to say, from pulpit, and platform and press some of the most warlike utterances are from professed ministers of the Gospel! How strange the spectacle of an "Ambassador of Christ" preaching war in the name of the Prince of Peace! In the name of him who said "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father in Heaven." (Matt. V 43-45.)

A Christian is defined as "a disciple of Christ. One whose profession and life con-

form to the teaching and example of Christ.'' Does the life of the man behind the gun, or of the man who condones or justifies or applauds the killing, conform to the teaching and example of Christ? Certainly we can imagine nothing more at variance with the gospel of peace, than the hatred and violence and crime of war. 'War is hell,'' said General Sherman, and few men knew better than he, what war was and is.

The early Christians steadily refused all military service, as inconsistent with their religion. Dymond says that ''For two centuries there could not be found a single Christian soldier in the army.'' Need we further evidence that Friends were right on the question of war?

Friends also differ from most other religious bodies in regard to judicial oaths. We believe Christ meant just what he said ''Swear not at all; neither by heaven for it is God's throne, nor by the earth for it is His footstool. But let your communications be, yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matt. V-34-37.) By this it is evident that our Sa-

vior meant that we should tell the plain and simple truth, and truth in its simplicity is more potential than oath-entrenched falsehood! James also says (V. 12) "But above all things my brethren swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath, but let your yea be yea, and your nay nay lest ye fall into condemnation." I deem it unnecessary to adduce further proof that Friends have followed Christian teaching in refusing to swear.

Another easily recognizable difference between Friends and other denominations is in regard to the ministry. Holding the ministry to be a gift of God, freely bestowed by the Head of the Church, and to be exercised under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we claim it to be, by its very nature, entirely without the domain of marketable commodities. We find nowhere in the teaching of Christ or his Apostles any evidence that the gospel was to be a matter of barter or sale, or a matter of mercenary consideration. Indeed as we recall Peter's scathing rebuke to Simon the Sorcerer, who thought to buy the power of communicating the Holy

Ghost by the laying on of hands, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. "(Acts VIII 20), we may well wonder at the commercialism, which has become so interwoven with the ministry as a profession throughout Christendom.

How strikingly in contrast with it, stands out the example of Paul working with his hands, that he might not be chargeable or burdensome to the churches among which he labored. "Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands, have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." (Acts XX. 34). Our claim is, that this gift, freely bestowed, should be freely exercised. "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt X. 8) was the command of the Master to his disciples when sending them on their first gospel mission. The minister, if truly anointed, becomes simply the instrument or medium through which the gospel message flows, agreeably to our Lord's declaration to his disciples; "For it is not ye that speak, but

the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Matt X. 20.).

Accepting and believing this as the true idea of gospel ministry, it follows that the minister's duty may be to speak, or it may be to keep silent, because Christ the Great Minister of ministers can and often does speak to the human soul immediately by his Holy Spirit. How reverently should the human minister wait to know the call and putting forth of the Divine! On the other hand the very nature of a paid ministry presupposes it to be the ministers duty to perform the service for which he is paid.

Intimately connected with this view of gospel ministry, is the waiting worship which has characterized the Religious Society of Friends for two hundred and fifty years. It recognizes, as true, our Lord's declaration to the woman of Samaria, that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth;" that this is an act to be performed between the individual soul and its Creator; therefore we endeavor, when assembled for Divine worship to attain to that quiet

introversion of mind, wherein we may experience the fulfillment of the prophet's words, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, etc." In this waiting attitude of spirit, with all our expectation turned to Christ the Head of the Church, we are in a state susceptible to the influence of the gospel message whether received immediately or instrumentally, susceptible to those influences and aspirations, and heart-yearnings after holiness that go to make up acceptable worship.

With this view of the spirituality of worship, and the preciousness of the spiritual communion, it is not remarkable that Friends should reject the Eucharist, or, so-called celebration of the "Lord's Supper." Our contention is that Christ did not by "eating the Passover with his disciples," institute any new rite or ordinance; as a part of his mission on earth, was the completion and abrogation of the rites and ceremonies of the law, "Having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments contained in ordinances" etc. (Eph II. 15). His special mission, the infusion of spirituality into the religious life of the world

could hardly have been advanced by the introduction of new rites, which are but "shadows of good things to come" (Heb. X. 1) and can never "make the comers thereunto perfect." Why should we be satisfied with, or cling to the shadow, when in the fulness of the gospel plan we may enjoy the substance, direct spiritual communion with our Father in Heaven?

Another question widely discussed, and a doctrine on which scarce any two denominations agree is baptism. The fact that no mandatory or binding authority for water-baptism, can be found in the New Testament, is, perhaps, the reason for such wide diversity of opinion regarding its administration: while to us who believe that the one necessary and saving baptism is that of the spirit, all seems clear and plain, and in harmony with the spiritual simplicity of the gospel. While water baptism was practiced by some of the disciples, it seems to have been administered only to the Jews and Jewish proselytes. Baptism as well as circumcision had been practiced among the Israelites for centuries, and it was difficult for them to accept a spiritual

meaning for these terms, and they held tenaciously to both, even insisting on circumcision for gentile converts.

Paul whose broad and catholic spirit grasped the truth more readily than some of the Apostles soon perceived that "Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter. (Rom. II. 29). He also tells us (Eph. IV. 5) that there is "One Lord, one faith, and one baptism." In the first chapter of 1st. Corinthians he thanks God that he baptized none of them but Crispus and Gaius, "for," said he, "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel." Here he was evidently writing of water baptism, as there had been contention among the Corinthians, which he was endeavoring to reconcile, as is shown in the context.

The line of distinction seems very clearly drawn, in the New Testament, between John's baptism, that of water, and Christ's baptism, that of the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. In examining Christs commission to his apostles, as he was about to leave them, we find but one place (Matt. XXVIII. 19 R. V.) where baptism is even men-

tioned as a part of their mission, and that in such a way as to give little comfort to the advocates of water baptism. "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into (not in) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" or "Holy Spirit." Mark's rendering of the meaning of Christ's command on the same occasion is "Go ye unto all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark. XVI. 15 R. V.) Luke's understanding of it was, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke XXIV. 47) John says "Then said Jesus unto them again, 'Peace be unto you: as my Father has sent me, even so send I you.' " (John XX. 21.) It is interesting in this connection, to remember Christ's words "As my Father hath sent me even so send I you," and with it the declaration of John (IV.•2) "Jesus himself baptized not." Hence it would seem he did not send his disciples to baptize with water. The other passages alluding to his commission to his disciples (Acts I. 4-5) (Acts 1.8) (Acts X. 42) make

no mention of baptism whatever. The rendering of Matt XXVIII. 19 seems to make it clear that His meaning was this, "baptizing them" (by the Holy Spirit) "into the name" (or power) "of the Father" etc. We contend that this is the logical inference to draw from the text; that it is in harmony with correlative scripture passages, and with the whole trend of the Master's teaching. More argument might be adduced, but I deem this sufficient to enable us to see with Peter, that the baptism that saves "is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (I Peter III. 21.)

There are certain testimonies, long held by the Society, which have sometimes been designated the "Minor testimonies," which, while they do not commend themselves to the judgement of our entire membership, are to many not only a matter of conscience but of deep concern. The simple garb, the scripture language, the consistent demeanor of the "Quaker of the Olden Time," were formerly the visible tokens, whereby a Friend was known wher-

ever he might be. Today many a member is undistinguishable from the votary of fashion A simple test comes into mind whereby we may judge of the merits of this change. Has the Society grown in numbers, in influence, in vital religion because of these changes? I leave it with you to answer the question.

With regard to our language, I wish very briefly to state the fact, that not until about the time of George Fox did the use of the plural pronoun addressed to one person obtain foothold in public usage. Ecclesiastical and magisterial officers, pompous, and jealous of their honor, became unwilling to be accounted of no more importance than the common people, and began to require their attendants and others to address them as more than one, as "you," "Your honor," 'your worship" etc. Thus originated the "plural" form of speech which has become well-nigh universal among English-speaking people

Quick to detect error and pride, in this as in other things, George Fox and his co-believers declined its use, as well as the use of compliments, and complimentary

terms and titles, which likewise originated in pride and ostentation. On account of their faithful adherence to conviction, cruel and unrelenting abuse and persecution fell upon the early Friends, because of these testimonies, which are today so lightly esteemed by many bearing our name.

Our avoidance of the popular names of the days of the week is not simply to be singular, but because they are borrowed from heathen mythology, the days thus named having been devoted to the worship of the idol or heathen deity, who's name is thus perpetuated Against this recognition of pagan superstition, Friends have a testimony to bear. For similar reasons we avoid the popular names of the months; using instead the numeral method of designating them, this being not only more correct, but more convenient, as attested by the large and increasing number of business houses that use it.

I am aware that the plea is made that general usage renders all these things correct, but certainly they had their genesis in pride and error, and perhaps still retain somewhat of that nature. Indeed

to express my honest opinion I must say that I believe pride has much to do with their use among Friends today.

The use of compliments and complimentary titles is sometimes urged, on grounds of politeness and good breeding. We believe in true politeness and Christian courtesy; but sincerity is one of the greatest charms of either, while many of the complimentary terms in common use are not used sincerely.

The question of dress is another whereon there is wide difference of opinion, even among our own membership, many holding that there is "nothing in dress," while many others feel concerned that their dress shall become, or befit their profession of Godliness. We do not claim that there is religion in dress, but there certainly is religion in obedience to our conscientious convictions and scruples. Gay and fashionable apparel and behavior have never been characteristic of the devout and humble follower of Christ. They evidently were not in the Apostle Paul, as shown by his epistles. Listen to his advice to the Hebrews. (XII. 2) "And be not conformed

to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Entire uniformity in dress was never urged or held by the Religious Society of Friends as important, but a simple comfortable style of dress suited to our circumstances, and indicating more concern for our spiritual than for our personal adornment. Disregard of the fickle and arbitrary demands of fashion, against which we have a protest to make, will soon render us, either individually or collectively more or less peculiar. But I trust we may not shrink from peculiarity when obedience, faith and conscience are at stake. God's people have always been a "peculiar people." Not peculiar in the sense of being odd or singular for singularity's sake, but peculiar in the sense of its proper definition "Having a character exclusively their own." Peter, in his first general epistle to the Church says. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood. a holy nation, a "peculiar people;" that ye should show forth the

praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

As our hearts are filled with the Divine love, and our lives brought under the government of Christ, I believe our dress and behavior will come to conform to the simplicity of his gospel. This simplicity is not an evidence of a weak mind. Wm. Penn, Robert Barclay, Dr. Fothergill, Stephen Grellett, John G. Whittier and others, known and beloved in both hemispheres, retained their simple plainness of speech and dress whether among their Friends at home; amid the applause and appreciation of the world or in the presence of its greatest sovereigns. If Quakerism was broad enough for such men and for such places, is it not broad enough for you and for me?

There is but one more point of doctrine to which I will refer tonight, as you have listened long and patiently. It is the doctrine of the resurrection. We fully accept and believe in the resurrection of the dead as taught by Christ and His apostles. Paul has most beautifully explained and illustrated this much discussed question, in

the 15 of 1 Cor. With him we believe in the resurrection, not of the body, but of the spirit. "But some men will say, how are the dead raised up and with what body do they appear?" "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, its is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." Not after long years, or ages as some suppose, but when death releases the spirit from its tenement of clay, "then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it "there to be judged according to the deeds done in the body."

I do not imagine that I have given you any great exposition of Quakerism. I am not competent to do that, and one evening is too short for more than a very brief

glimpse at the more salient features of our profession. But if any of you have gained a more definite idea of our religious belief, if any of you have been helped to see the beauty and simplicity of a spiritual religion unvexed by ritual, and untrammeled by sacerdotalism, and are therefore better content with our religious profession, with the faith of our fathers, I shall be content.

My earnest desire for us is that we may more earnestly and faihfully follow the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit, dwell in the gentle and forgiving spirit of Christ our Redeemer, with our thoughts, words, and actions brought under Divine control, through help received by daily communion with Omnipotence.

As this is our daily concern, we will in greater measure be favored to exemplify in our daily lives, the ideals of our religious belief, and "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things," and if this may happily be the case, both the Church and the world will have been benefitted by our lives.

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